



CHAPTER 12

Impact of Anti-American Sentiments in the ROK on the U.S.-ROK Security Alliance

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Introduction

Many Americans have been surprised and angered at what appears to be a recent flare-up of anti-Americanism in the Republic of Korea over a tragic traffic accident that took the lives of two middle school girls. The United States decision-makers have already initiated a partial pullback from the DMZ near Seoul and are openly contemplating a complete withdrawal from the Korean peninsula.

Those who are concerned about this apparent deterioration in the U.S.-ROK alliance have been quick to point out that anti-Americanism is not new to the ROK. Radical South Korean students, for example, burned the Stars and Stripes with such shocking frequency in the 1980s and 1990s that at the time, North Koreans jokingly suggested that Americans should feel safer in Pyongyang than in Seoul. Clearly, the relationship between America and Korea has been marked by “mood swings” ever since it was consummated by the Schufeld Treaty almost a century and a half ago. But even to sanguine students of Korea

this new outburst of anti-Americanism looks different. More than ever before, the shrill tones of anti-Americanism in the street are echoing through the corridors of power in East Asia's most vibrant and volatile new democracy.

Does this new chapter in anti-Americanism in Korea pose a significant long-term threat to the security alliance between the U.S. and the ROK? And if so, just how large a danger is it? Before attempting to answer these questions, a closer examination of anti-Americanism in Korea is essential to gain a better understanding of its origins, for while anti-Americanism demonstrations are triggered by single, specific issues related to the U.S.-ROK relationship, the underlying roots of these outbreaks are far more complex.

Four Roots of Anti-Americanism in the ROK

Four primary sources of anti-American sentiment in the Republic of Korea can be readily identified. Each waxes and wanes in response to different changes in Korea's physical and mental environment. Each one of these causes poses different challenges to the U.S.-ROK relationship. And finally, only when the variables unique to each type are plotted separately can one catch a glimpse of what the overall impact of anti-Americanism may have on the U.S.-ROK alliance as a whole.

“East-West Polarity” Anti-Americanism

Ever since gunboat diplomacy forced Asian states to open ports to Western trade, many East Asian's have tended to view modernity as a cataclysmic clash of civilizations. When viewed through the prism of the “East-West polarity,” recent history is a struggle for domination by two diametrically opposite forces, the West (America and Western Europe) and East Asia. This way of thinking tends to associate the West with innovation, action, aggression, materialism, and potentially more destructive, while

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the East is understood to be more traditional, subtle, cerebral, passive, spiritual and more in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Even East Asian imperialism incorporated the East-West polarity views into its ideology. The Japanese defended their quest for the dominance of Asia in the first half of the 20th century as a defense of East Asian tradition against the West. A Korean version of the East-West polarity can be identified in the theology of the Tonghak Movement of the late 19th century. In this indigenous religious movement “reject the foreign (West)” became a rallying cry for a Confucian-style reform of the state and society. Ironically, the Tonghak definition of the West included a rapidly modernizing Japan that was beginning to encroach on Korean sovereignty. The East-West polarity thinking can be also seen in Korea today in a large variety of movements aimed at promoting Korean culture, agricultural products and traditional medicine. In each case, something uniquely valuable from East Asia is understood to be threatened by something aggressive and destructive from the West.

Anti-Americanism related to the East-West polarity perspective is more general and less focused on specific issues in the U.S.-ROK relationship. It is more of a “background anti-Americanism” that inclines Koreans to see what is valuable in their way of life under constant pressure from a dominant American-led Western culture. This sense of “cultural victimization” predisposes Koreans to sympathize with anyone who opposes America in a dispute. Because this form of anti-American sentiment has clear racial undertones, by its very nature it is more difficult to address through policy initiatives than any other form of anti-Americanism.

“Coming of Age” Anti-Americanism

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In contradistinction to the low-level, background character of anti-American sentiment stemming from the East-West polarity perspective, anti-Americanism related to the ROK's "coming of age" is sharper and more acute. Paradoxically, to the extent that the East-West polarity anti-Americanism celebrates what is different between East and West, the "coming of age" anti-Americanism is a reaction against perceived discrimination, and a demand for parity and equality between Korea and the United States. For example, President Park Chung-hee's so-called "Korean-style Democracy" was an attempt to place an indigenous expression of democracy on the same level with the Western democratic tradition. This nativist approach to democracy and human rights has been elaborated by subsequent ROK leaders, who have claimed that democracy in Korea developed naturally from tradition rather than from foreign influences.

South Korea's desire to be seen as a modern society on a par with other developed nations has made its public extremely sensitive to perceived discrimination by America or what it believes are insults against its dignity. The U.S. pressure on the ROK to open its markets, for example, was interpreted by many to be demeaning to South Korean national sovereignty. While various incidents, including the International Monetary Fund reforms have made many Koreans angry that those international organizations, acting at the bidding of powerful nations, would presume to usurp policy-making power. At one point, IMF pressure on the ROK was seen as a covert attempt by the United States and the West to take over the Korean economy.

Still, no issue has sparked a more heated anti-Americanism than the death of two middle school girls as a result of a U.S. Army traffic accident. This incident was "proof positive," at least to a majority of South Koreans, that the U.S. has little respect for the lives or laws of the Republic of Korea. This perception sharpened when South Koreans compared their Status of Forces

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Agreement with those concluded between the U.S. and other nations. "Coming of age" anti-Americanism, thus, is rooted in a perception that the U.S. does not appreciate the progress the ROK has made and still wishes to treat Korea as an inferior client state.

"Hope and Disappointment" Anti-Americanism

Just as "coming of age" anti-Americanism is Korea centered, springing from Korean sensitivities about a perceived lack of the U.S. recognition of Korean accomplishments, anti-Americanism stemming from perceived inconsistencies between American ideals and American practices relates to the image of America in Korean eyes. The dynamic relationship between the U.S. and Korea has been punctuated with times when Koreans held very high (some would say unrealistic) expectations of the United States. Not surprisingly, the disappointment felt by Koreans whose faith in America was shattered, has given birth to a new kind of anti-American sentiments.

The best example of the "hope and disappointment" anti-Americanism was the March 1, 1919, Movement. Taking President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points as an article of faith and believing that the victors of the World War I were truly committed to freeing all oppressed peoples, Koreans staged one of the world's first and largest non-violent demonstrations against the Japanese occupation. Japanese colonial authorities responded to these mass demonstrations for Korean liberation with characteristic brutality. Much to Korea's disappointment, America refused to become involved on their behalf. Subsequently, large numbers of Korean intellectuals turned away from liberal democracy to Marxism as the only hope for Korean liberation. The Korean War saw Korean expectations rise when America responded to the North Korean invasion and fall when President Truman refused to commit the United States to total liberation of the peninsula from communism.

Another example of this type of "hope and disappointment" anti-Americanism appeared when President Park Chung-hee crushed the pro-democracy student demonstrations in the early 1970s. This outbreak of negative feelings toward the U.S. was inspired by bitter disappointment with what some Koreans saw as American collusion with the harsh military dictator. As a result, many Koreans automatically assumed a decade later that the U.S. had played an active role in suppressing the Kwangju Uprising in May 1980. Even among those who were not convinced of American involvement, disappointment with the lack of U.S. support for the Kwangju uprising sent public sentiment about the U.S. into the "negative numbers" from where it never completely rebounded. This was the first time significant numbers of Koreans had come to believe that the United States was not committed to its own declared values. The cynicism about the U.S. commitment to democracy and human rights that surfaced in conjunction with the Kwangju Uprising, paradoxically, marked a critical point in the ROK's incorporation of the political and social principles championed by the United States. As would be shown in the election of Mr. Kim Dae-jung and his successor, Mr. Roh Moo-hyun to the presidency of the ROK, Koreans were now ready to judge the U.S. by its own standards.

The indigenization of democratic and human rights values is nowhere more clearly illustrated than the last two South Korean presidential elections. With the ascendancy of Mr. Kim Dae-jung to the Blue House, Korea elected its first indigenous proponent of values commonly associated with the Western society. Mr. Kim, a seminal thinker, based his own political philosophy on the claim that democracy, in fact, sprang from Korean roots rather than as a foreign import. Still, Mr. Kim Dae-jung's presidency did not mark a complete break from the past because this champion of democracy and human rights, and Nobel laureate owed his life to U.S. intervention when his rival and president, General Park Chung-hee tried to assassinate him early in his

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career. As Koreans readily admit, without U.S. protection, Korea's best known champion of democracy would have been killed by one or another of the ROK's military regimes.

President Roh Moo-hyun's election was a true watershed. It marked the first time the ROK had chosen a leader who was known both as a champion of democracy and human rights and at the same time, a vocal critic of the United States. His election, delivered by an upsurge of anti-American sentiment, effectively severed once-and-for-all the link between America and democracy in the Korean public consciousness. And though the United States may never again be the paragon of democracy and human rights in the eyes of the Korean public, Americans can take comfort in the fact that American values are now tightly woven, probably permanently, into the fabric of Korean life and society.

Solidarity with North Korea Anti-Americanism

Anti-Americanism resulting from the South Korean public's growing sense of solidarity with North Korea combines elements from all three of the types of anti-American sentiment described above: East-West polarity, "coming of age", and "hope and disappointment" anti-Americanism. Increasingly U.S. policy toward North Korea is viewed through three "lenses" of anti-American sentiment. Particularly, when America is seen as taking a hard line toward North Korea, Washington's actions are liable to be seen through all three lenses at once: the East-West polarity anti-Americanism, with its markedly strong racial overtones; the "coming of age" anti-Americanism, characterized by hyper-sensitivity toward supposed slights against Korean dignity; and the "hope and disappointment" anti-Americanism, that emphasizes the strong contrasts between American values and American actions.

Korean attitudes toward the Iraq War, Washington's first official action against President George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil," have led to the most negative assessment of U.S. motives in recent history. Even many South Korean conservatives are now beginning to couch pro-American sentiment by making a clear distinction between a relatively innocent American public and a not-so-innocent American government. Those who take comfort in this fine distinction between the American public and its government should remember that it is chillingly similar to North Korea's official protestations of good feeling for "ordinary Americans" but hatred for its leaders.

Predicting Trends in Anti-Americanism

The alarming growth of anti-American sentiment in the ROK makes it difficult to be sanguine about the future of the U.S.-ROK Security Alliance. Because each form of anti-Americanism has a different "half-life" and draws sustenance from different sources, their aggregate negative impact on the alliance may not be as inevitable as it might appear – providing, of course, that anti-American sentiment in Korea is moderated by prudent U.S. policy decisions. Unhappily, to date Washington's searchlight on North Korea has thrown these troubling developments in the South into the shadows. Without a well-guided policy overhaul, the various types of anti-Americanism will follow their own unique logic and continue to threaten the alliance.

The East-West polarity anti-American sentiment is least sensitive to U.S. policy. Instead, the relative wax or wane of this form of anti-Americanism will depend more on developments within East Asia itself. If East Asia takes steps toward a common community, similar to Europe, the East-West polarity thinking is likely to strengthen as competition between the East and West is seen in increasingly racial terms. On the other hand, this form of anti-American sentiment may continue to be held in check by traditional rivalries among East Asian states. At present, China's

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recent attempt to lay claim to Koguryo, one of the three proto-Korean states, has dampened this type of anti-Americanism.

The "coming of age" anti-American sentiment is more U.S. policy sensitive than the East-West polarity thinking. While this form of anti-Americanism has badly shaken the U.S.-ROK alliance recently, it is likely to subside in time as the ROK public becomes more comfortable with their expanding roll in world affairs. As Korea assumes a more active role in the international community, Korea's perception of itself in respect to the U.S. will be tempered by Korea's relationships with the community of nations as a whole, as well as an increasing appreciation for the complexity governing relations between states. On the other hand, if a majority of Koreans come to believe that they are falling behind economically, particularly as a result of American policy, this type of anti-Americanism is likely to spike.

The "hope and disappointment" anti-Americanism is more cumulative when compared to the "coming of age" anti-Americanism and, as a consequence, less and less affected by particular U.S. policies. The long-term impact of this kind of anti-Americanism, nevertheless, is unmistakable. For example, because the U.S. no longer embodies democratic principles to the extent that it once did, policy initiatives designed to promote American values, such as the recent legislation in support of human rights in North Korea, no longer find wide support in South Korea.

Of the three types of anti-U.S. sentiment, anti-Americanism related to South Korea's growing sense of its common identity with North Korea poses the greatest challenge to the U.S.-ROK security alliance. The "solidarity with North Korea" anti-Americanism, moreover, is likely to increase, rather than decrease with time. The closer South and North grow together, the more likely will be anti-American sentiment from a sense of solidarity with the North.

As Cold War ideologies subside and contacts with the North increase, more and more South Koreans have abandoned the once popularly held belief that Korea was divided by the struggle between democracy and communism. Instead, they see the Korean War as but one more example of how their small nation has been victimized throughout its history by imperialist powers. A growing sense of pan-Korean nationalism and ethnic pride is developing as the two Korea's rediscover each other.

As South Korea's democracy has matured, this kind of sentiment has found greater and greater voice in public policy. For the alliance to survive, Washington must find a way to articulate U.S. interests in ways that affirms Korean ethnic aspirations. Maintaining a positive dialogue, not only with South Korea's government, but even more importantly, with the Korean public will determine the future, not only of anti-Americanism, but of the alliance itself. Clearly, there is much work to be done if the U.S.-ROK alliance is to be saved. Just as clearly, the first step is for American policy makers to tear their eyes off North Korea long enough to better understand what is happening in South Korea. Unless they do, the U.S.-ROK alliance, which was formed to meet the threat from the North, may flounder because its proponents looked backward, instead of forward, and North instead of South.

South Korea: The Most Important Variable

For decades, North Korea's forward-deployed military posture and nascent nuclear program have riveted U.S. attention to the northern half of the peninsula in its quest for a stable, peaceful Korea. And while the future of North Korea may have important implications for the War on Terrorism, trends in anti-Americanism below the 38th Parallel suggest that Washington may be asking the wrong questions when it comes to its long term interests in East Asia.

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Populist President Roh Moo-hyun's terse defense of his decision to send the ROK troops to Iraq spoke volumes about how the U.S.-Korea alliance is viewed by a significant portion of South Koreans. In answer to the question, "Why should South Korea back the United States?" the president's reply was a slightly longer Korean equivalent of the Clinton administration's well-known saying, "It's the economy, stupid." Roh's answer deeply angered those who are old enough to remember the Korean War – and made perfect sense to the younger South Koreans who elected him. Instead of harking back to American sacrifices for Korea during the Korean War, or gratitude for the U.S. security umbrella that incubated South Korea's rise to economic might, President Roh's defense was solidly present and pragmatic. If Korean soldiers were to die in the Middle East, it had to be for something relevant today, something Korea's rising generation could really connect with. Even more than North Korea's WMD programs, this generational "sensibility gap" in Korea, typified by Mr. Roh's remark, today frames the greatest challenge to the U.S.-ROK alliance. In short, "what is happening to the alliance" is really "what has happened to South Korea."

In the past few decades the ROK has morphed into a society that is in some areas even more advanced than the West. The speed and direction of change in South Korea has transported its youth to a new universe, altering not only their views of the United States, but everything else along the way. Coming to terms with where South Korea is today can help shed light, not only on its evolving relationship with America, but also where East Asia may be headed in the new century.

The Connected Society

Korea is quintessentially the "connected society" and is far more "wired" than any nation on earth, including the United States. Korea has the highest computer literacy rate in the world. Cell

phone usage in Korea is also far higher than in the West. Korean phones are slimmer, lighter and faster, a generation ahead of their American counterparts and have become an essential accessory for everyone, regardless of their age or status. Young Koreans have taken cell phones, the first truly personal computer, to a new level. Far from simply a convenient implement, as one Western advertisement put it, “to reach out and touch someone,” cell phones are a primary means of maintaining constant contact with one’s personal network. Just as the Internet has become a “virtual village” for some people, a “web” of cell phone connections defines community for many young South Koreans.

Technological advances are not the only reason why Koreans are so “connected.” High-speed communication in Korea is enhanced by the fact that 40% of its population is packed into the capital city and the province that surrounds it. Imagine an America where most people live in a single city between Baltimore and Richmond. South Korea, in other words, has no “heartland.” Just as Koreans have migrated to the cities, urban values have infiltrated the countryside, reducing what was East Asia’s most rural culture to periodic celebrations of local pageantry that have little to do with everyday life for most residents.

This synergy of technology and geography has created a society that is both diverse and homogeneous at the same time. Never, since communities expanded beyond the communal campfire, has it been so easy to get everyone’s attention -- and hold it. Korea’s shared ethnic consciousness makes it far easier to maintain that focus as the media shifts the public’s attention from one issue to the next. By way of contrast, pluralistic societies also may experience this kind of “connectedness,” but only relatively briefly in times of crisis, as demonstrated by the United States after Sept. 11. Due to the high level of pervasive “connectedness,” South Korea’s sense of the nation as “community” is far more continuous than what is experienced by

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people in pluralistic societies like the United States. Increasingly, South Korea feels like one large city, a technological reinvention of the Greek polis, a focus group writ large. Korea, thus, has become one of the first “virtual democracies” where public reaction to issues is so rapid that intermediate institutions, like political parties, have a hard time surviving several election cycles. This sense of “connectedness,” however, has come with a price.

The Disconnected Society

South Korea’s rapid industrialization, growing affluence, and migrating population, means its people are increasingly disconnected from their past. Progress, while providing more opportunities for the average citizen than ever before, has also brought with it a fast-paced urban lifestyle that has little tangible connection to history.

What remains of South Korea’s pre-war infrastructure has almost vanished. Few structures from the past have survived South Korea’s relentless march toward modernity. New roads, forests of apartments, and modern skyscrapers dwarf the remnants of Korea’s traditional architecture in the few places they can still be found. Even the geography itself has changed. Thanks to modern earth-moving equipment, the very contours of the land have been altered. Even Korea’s famous mountains have yielded to these insatiable machines. Streambeds have been stripped of their sand for concrete, turning many clear streams into muddy channels and reed beds. On the other hand, forests now blanket mountains once scraped bare in an unrelenting search for firewood. South Korea’s coal industry relieved the trees, only to be replaced in turn when Korea grew prosperous enough to afford cleaner oil and gas.

A river called Progress is altering Korea’s psychological landscape, as well. A concern to those who still remember the

Japanese colonial period, increasing numbers of Korea's youth are making their peace with Japan. The Japanese language has become the second most popular foreign language (after English), and Korea's youth are developing a taste for Japanese fashion, culture and music. Japanese youth are also more open to Korea than their elders. Jumbo jets have made Korea far closer (and less expensive) than many destinations in their own country. More and more of them are taking the 90-minute flight to Seoul for the weekend where Japanese and Korean youth cultures mingle. Meanwhile, South Korean chic has swept not only Japan but also China, Taiwan, Macao, and Hong Kong, making Korean pop stars the definition of "cool" for an East Asia that is finding its own voice after a century of borrowing from the West.

The greatest change in Korea's psychological roadmap has been a tectonic shift in attitudes toward North Korea. The place that once inspired fear has given way to curiosity and even condescension. Images of the Korean War have faded in the national memory, to be replaced by pictures of the North's drab buildings, antiquated vehicles, empty streets and hungry children. For many young South Koreans, North Koreans are little more than less sophisticated "country cousins" badly in need of a loan. More than a threat, to Korea's rising generation, North Korea is a bother. Not surprisingly, older, more conservative Koreans find the change in thinking about North Korea current among the young positively alarming. Lacking shared experience of the Korean War, the "generational gap" has become the "ideological gap." As recent polls prove, ideological polarization of South Korean society may even transcend traditional sectional rivalries. And ironically, while their grandparents would find much that is familiar about North Korea today, if magically transported to North Korea, young Koreans would think that they had landed on another planet. No wonder public support in South Korea for an alliance built upon fifty year-old fears is dwindling.

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Three Threats to the Alliance

South Korea's steady loss of memory due to generational change is not the only threat to the U.S.-ROK alliance. Young South Koreans are turning against the United States not only because the blinding speed of change has "disconnected" them from their nation's past. The biggest challenge to the future of the alliance, in fact, is how young Koreans perceive America today. In a sense, it is a wonder the U.S.-ROK alliance isn't in worse shape than it is given the fact that so many of Korea's rising generation see the U.S. concerns as a serious threat to the peninsula. While it may be tempting to blame their negative view of America on anti-American educators in South Korea's school system, to do so would be to tell only part of the story. The sharp spike in anti-Americanism has more to do with the present and future than with the past. Stated simply, for all too many young South Koreans, the United States poses a threat to Korea's economy, security, and national aspirations.

For the past decade, South Koreans have watched with increasing alarm as a flood of cheap goods from China have muscled Korean products out of some of the world's most lucrative markets. According to a recently published report, moreover, South Korea is a scant two and a half years ahead of China technologically. Concern that South Korea is losing its economic edge has fueled, in part, Seoul's thirst for economic ties with the North. For many South Koreans, particularly young entrepreneurs, cheap North Korean labor may be their last hope of regaining a competitive advantage against the on-rushing Chinese economic juggernaut.

Indeed, Seoul has much to gain economically from improved relations between Washington and Pyongyang. The U.S. policy toward North Korea, contrarily, is costing South Korea dearly. Not only is the U.S. market closed to North Korean products, but complying with U.S. economic pressure on the North has

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impeded South Korean access to this “final frontier” for South Korea’s stumbling economy. Young South Koreans, not surprisingly, have the most to gain from economic ties with North Korea and the most to lose as the diplomatic stalemate between Washington and Pyongyang drags on and on.

For many South Koreans, the economic threat posed by the U.S. policy toward North Korea is compounded by a perceived security threat, as well. For those who are too young to remember the Korean War, it is hard to imagine that North Korea could pose a significant military challenge to the prosperous and more populous South. They are convinced, moreover, that Pyongyang would never use nuclear weapons against fellow Koreans. On the other hand, Washington’s aggressive pursuit of the War on Terror, particularly its pre-emptive policy, looks like a threat to the “peace-balance” that has made possible the greatest period of economic prosperity East Asia has ever known. Given enough time and patience, young Koreans believe, North Korea will inevitably be drawn into the East Asian community and reflect more and more of the economic and social values characteristic of this dynamic part of the world. But, if destabilized by excessive U.S. pressure, a disintegrating North Korea could ignite the whole region.

Finally, to many young South Koreans, America poses a significant risk to Korean ethnic aspirations even if its WMD witch-hunt doesn’t plunge the peninsula into war. When the alliance was born, South Korea’s national survival depended on U.S. military might. But now, the physical embodiment of that alliance -- American troops on Korean soil -- are an obstacle to Korean reunification.

Despite South Korea’s meteoric rise on the world stage, continued division of the peninsula is seen by some Koreans to be the greatest danger to the future of Korea. Believing that a reunited peninsula is Korea’s best chance for long-term survival

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in their intensely competitive and nationalistic neighborhood, younger South Koreans with no memories of the horrors of the Korean War are inclined to risk life without U.S. troops in order to achieve reunification, rather than to accept the status-quo and rely on American good will for their present and future security.

Who Values the Alliance?

North Koreans, ironically, are far more aware of the value of the U.S.-ROK alliance than their compatriots in the South. From their perspective, not only did the alliance prevent reunification of the Korean peninsula under communism, but it has given the South an unfair advantage in its competition with the North. Just as the alliance has made South Korea rich, they reason, it has made North Korea poor. And to add insult to injury, their erstwhile allies, the Chinese, have all but forgotten the alliance between their two countries that used to be called as “close as lips and teeth.”

When it comes to alliances, Washington and Pyongyang have more in common than they may realize. Both have to deal with an alliance partner who has been seduced by progress. Just as many in South Korea no longer appreciate the value of their alliance with Washington, even so China’s rising generation sees little value in their country’s alliance with Pyongyang. Paradoxically, American and North Korean youth have something in common, too. Unlike their South Korean and Chinese peers, the rising generations in the United States and North Korea both have experienced major national catastrophes. The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the North Korean famine of 1995-97 serve as painful reminders to those who experienced them – and survived, that history holds no guarantees. And it is precisely from this kind of thinking that alliances are born.

Whither the Alliance?

Like all living things, alliances either grow or die. Alliances are forged on common goals and rust when they are no longer perceived as mutually beneficial. Just as surely, the mutual security alliance between the United States and South Korea will weaken if a majority of South Koreans continue to believe the U.S. War on Terrorism and resulting pressure on the North threatens their national security, economic prosperity, and ethnic aspirations. In such an environment, candle light parades are protest, not only for the victims of tragic traffic accidents, but vigils for a seriously sick alliance.

Still all is not lost. As NATO has shown on one hand and America's ephemeral coalition against Iraq has proven on the other, we live in an era when it is far easier to expand alliances than to create new ones. Like the security pact that provided a half-century of European peace, the "Alliance for Peace" on the Korean peninsula will have to expand or face a Warsaw Pact fate. Catastrophes indeed make strange bedfellows. For decades Pyongyang has wooed Washington in hopes of wedding the twin sister of the U.S.-ROK alliance. The belief that the alliance has been the key, not only to South Korea's survival, but also to its prosperity has driven North Korea's foreign policy for decades, and some would argue, even its programs for weapons of mass destruction.

One thing is certain: neither outright threats, vaguely worded security guarantees nor humanitarian assistance will win Washington's way with Pyongyang ... or more importantly ... with Seoul. While not always the best teacher, history can sometimes point the way. As both Koreas have demonstrated recently, no WMD program can ever be reversed "permanently and irreversibly." In the end, finding a palatable way to expand the U.S.-ROK alliance to include North Korea may be the only peaceable way to denuclearize the peninsula.

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To put it differently, the United States simply cannot hope to maintain good relations with one Korea while remaining a mortal enemy of the other. Instead of a South Korea policy and a North Korea policy, what the United States needs badly is a “Pan-Korea policy;” a comprehensive approach that satisfies the aspirations of an increasingly democratically vocal South Korean public. Only if America can harmonize its interests with the Korean public’s sense of safety, and economic and national aspirations, will the Korean peninsula experience the peace, security, and national reunification that have eluded its people for so long.

